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Visual Ethnography of On-site Sport Sponsorship Activation: LG Action Sports Championship

J. Andrew Choi, David K. Stotlar, and S. Roger Park

Abstract

Sporting events have increasingly become the epicenter of sponsorship or logo showcasing and the concept of sponsorship has changed the way sport marketers view sporting events ever so drastically. The amount of logo exposure at sporting venues determines the fine line between instant elation and intolerable anguish for sport marketers. Do consumers then actually notice the multitude of logos that the sponsors bombard them with at these sporting events? The purpose of this study is to investigate what an average spectator at a sporting event visually records in a two-hour span. The research question is "Do on-site sponsor programs indeed match the interests of the fans?" Seventeen participants took photos of the "most interesting or meaningful scenes" at an action sports championship in September 2004 and shared the photos with the researchers in one-on-one interviews.

Visual Ethnography of On-site Sport Sponsorship Activation: LG Action Sports Championship

In order to make their brands recognized by consumers, corporations invest billions of dollars in a wide array of marketing activities. With the advent of "TiVo" and Digital Video Recorder (DVR) technology that allow consumers to tailor what they want to watch on TV literally down to each second, traditional TV advertising has lost some of its appeal to today's discerning marketers (Poole, 2004). Sponsorship, however, has

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served as more of an interactive and quick-impact option for name brand products throughout the world in recent times. Evidently, the global sponsorship market in 2003 has witnessed over 7% growth compared to previous year and was estimated at \$26.2 billion (Kolah, 2003). As the stake in sponsorship gets grander each year, the accountability issue in marketing expenditures within the organization also rises. According to a recent study done by the Seaver Marketing Group in San Diego, CA (Seaver, 2003), more and more companies focus on analyzing the Return-on-Investment (ROI) of sponsorships—more so for sport sponsorships. In order to rationalize the spending on sport sponsorships, sport managers have typically utilized quantitative measurement of media exposure, recall and recognition, sales and share changes, and so forth (Stotlar, 2000). Based on past experiences as sport marketing managers, however, the researchers often felt that the numbers could not tell the whole story on the effectiveness of sponsorship activation at sporting events. A simple yes-or-no answer from the fans cannot possibly encompass all there is to know about their attitudes and perceptions about the activities of sponsors at the venue.

The purpose of this research was to look beyond what the numbers suggest and to examine, in-depth, the interests and experiences of a spectator during a sponsored event. Recently, some research efforts have been made in terms of "measuring experience" with quantitative metrics, but many identify constraints in such a quantitative approach (Wyner, 2003). This research aimed to provide useful insights to corporate sponsorship managers by asking the spectators whether on-site sponsorship activities, such as product displays, signs, and other interactive programs, actually match with the interests of their marketing audience. Specifically, this study focused on the sponsorship activation case of LG Electronics, an up and coming Korean electronic brand in the United States (US) at a

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major action sports event. The results of this research will, hopefully, paint an explicit picture of what LG is doing correctly or incorrectly in connecting with the interests of its main consumers and eventually guide LG to pursue more consumer-oriented sponsorship activation. Therefore, the research question was: "Do LG's on-site sport activation programs match the interests of the spectators at the venue?"

Raising brand awareness, defined by Aaker (1996) as "both the knowledge and the salience of the brand in the customer's mind" (p. 330-331), to a targeted group of consumers can be accomplished through multiple channels. However, long-term sports sponsorships not only build brand awareness, but also develop images that the brand wants to build (Armstrong, 1988). For the next three to five years, the primary objective of LG is to elevate awareness of its brand and products to its core consumers, but their long-term goal in brand management is to create an image of "premium, digital brand of choice" for consumers in their twenties. By identifying and learning more about consumer interests at major sporting events, LG could establish clearer sponsorship strategies and allow it to attain its long-term marketing goal.

According to Crosby and Johnson (2003), "a critical first step in the new brand management is to develop a customer model that includes insight into how customers think and act, make purchase decisions, use products and services, and see your brands fitting into their lives" (p. 10). Without taking this critical first-step of identifying consumer interests—what attracts their attention and what is meaningful for them—at a sporting event, sponsors would have no idea whether one million dollars worth of logos and banners communicate effectively to the target consumer. In this respect, the researchers firmly believe that this study can visually and unequivocally explain what is going on inside the minds of consumers attending the event.

Methodology

Merriam (1998) defines ethnography as a sociocultural interpretation of the data. The author also discusses ethnographic techniques of data gathering such as interviewing, creating diaries, examining life histories, and observing participants. In either sense of the term, we believe that this study falls under the qualitative tradition of ethnography. Not only do these research techniques focus on examining the attitudes and cultures of the participants (sport spectators) through visual observation (photo journal) and interview, but also the nature of this study is an in-depth field study of naturally occurring behavior at a sporting event.

In addition to its multiple ethnographic aspects, this study featured photography as the primary data. Collier

(1986) contends "the critical eye of the camera could be an essential tool in gathering accurate visual information." (p. 5). He adds, "Not only is it a check on eye memory, but further, it allows for an absolute check of position and identification in congested and changing cultural events" (p. 10). A family promenade at the county fair or visiting a sporting event in our view is a culture, a culture that so many Americans have grown loyal to yet seldom probed in terms of effectiveness and relationship between the "provider" and the "consumer." Bluntly put, we wanted to see and examine through the lenses what sport-culture "consumers" see and identify as the scenes of their central interests at a sporting venue. We wanted to be "the eyes" of these sport spectators for a couple of hours and visually experience what interested them first hand. Unfortunately, for the lack of medical options, we had to settle for using a camera phone and what they could record.

"We wanted to be "the eyes" of these sport spectators for a couple of hours and visually experience what interested them first hand."

Theoretical framework

The study's theoretical framework is influenced by Constructionist's claim that meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting (Crotty, 1998). We believe that the data under scrutiny in this research, the most interesting or personally appealing scene at the action sport venue, can vary greatly according to the meaning that each participant bestows. This meaning has been constructed in the perspective of the participant by the past experiences, acquaintances, or education. Unveiling the "constructed meaning" of each photo was what made this research very exciting in the opinion of the authors. The identical two pictures can have entirely different meanings between two participants and this is what makes qualitative research so revealing and rewarding.

Data collection

The study utilized a visual ethnographic inquiry, specifically in the forms of photo-journaling and interviewing to examine the interests of the participant at the event. By comparing the actual data—the topic of pictures that the participants take—to the activities that the sponsor (LG) offers at the venue, the study was able to indicate which of the sponsored activities, if any, caught the eyes of the sampled spectators, and thus evaluate the effectiveness of sponsorship activation vis-à-vis sponsor's objectives.

A one-on-one interview with each participant was an essential component of data collection in this study, because the participants not only reviewed and talked

about each photo orally, but also spent a meaningful amount of time in discussing a variety of topics, such as brand loyalty, cell-phone experience, and general thoughts on LG. We felt strongly about this and thus could relate to the view of Dexter (1970) on the effectiveness of interviewing. "Interviewing is the preferred tactic of data collection when...it will get better or, more data or data at less cost than other tactics!" (p. 11). Furthermore, we employed the semi-structured interview as defined by Merriam (1998). This meant that a set of questions was used, some open-ended and some "yes or no" types, to ask to each participant, but we rarely tried to repeat each question verbatim. Depending on the initial response of the participant, we had to often insert relevant questions ad lib in order to attract elaboration or illumination.

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Participants & setting

The participants consisted of 17 adult spectators (18 years or above) attending the LG Action Sports Championships in Pomona, CA, between September 10 and 12, 2004. The sporting event was a part of the 16-day Los Angeles (L.A.) County Fair. As a result, the action sports event and local carnival organizers who set up rides and attractions as well as a number of merchandise tents were sharing the venue. According to the event organizer, this joint-event structure would benefit both parties in terms of expanding offerings to wider demographics. The study pursued purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990) because we felt strongly that we wanted to gain insights from the particular and most relevant sample.

The selection of 17 participants was based on the notion of "a point of saturation or redundancy" made by Lincoln and Guba (1985). "The sampling is terminated when no new information is forthcoming from new sampled units. (p. 202)" Since in our last few interviews the participants simply repeated information we had heard from others, we felt that it was time to stop. In addition, the length of the event, which lasted only three days, was also a factor in determining the number of interviews.

The researchers approached participants walking around at the venue and asked for their voluntary participation. Their right to volunteer, as well as the procedure of the study, was clearly explained when presenting

the informed consent. Using, recording, and analyzing the data only by numeric or alphabetical identifier have secured confidentiality of the source of the data. In addition, numeric identifiers were used for interview and the records were kept in a secure filing system.

Procedures

A tent was set up at the LG Action Sports Championship venue for this research. The participants were recruited on a voluntary basis at the venue and were then explained the procedures the study required. Once the participant agreed to engage in the study, the participants were asked simple screening questions ensuring that the participant had no personal or professional tie to any of the sponsors at the event. If and when the participant was deemed qualified to partake in the study, a digital camera phone was given to the participant. The participant was asked to take pictures throughout a two-hour duration with the camera phone provided. The pictures were to represent the subject or scenes that catch the participant's attention. The participants were not forced to take pictures that conflicted with their personal interest or will. In addition, the participant did not have to alter his/her plan of stay at the venue or go out of their way to participate in this research. The camera phone was to be used as if the participant had brought it from home, so the process was fairly naturalistic and casual.

When the participant returned to the research tent at the pre-designated time slot, the participant went through the pictures he or she had taken with the researchers and took part in a Question & Answer session on the motives and reasons behind taking each picture. For the purpose of this photo interviewing, the data were stored in the cell phones, and the participant was able to flick through the cell phone with the researchers to view each photo. The reply, for any sensitive question the participant did not feel comfortable in answering, was not forced. In addition to the explanation of each picture, we asked questions related to LG's on-site activities, other off-site brand activities, and the overall experience. This was to ensure that the main interests of participants are captured in the camera and no other potential data, such as some of the LG-sponsored programs, have been left out accidentally. At the end of the interview, which normally lasted no more than 30 minutes, each participant was given an event t-shirt and an action-sports DVD.

Data analysis

The primary data for this research were generated by photo-journaling. The pictures that the participant took and came back to the researchers with at the end of an assigned period were discussed and analyzed.

Since the focus of this study was to evaluate effectiveness of sports sponsorship activation, some supplemental questions were also asked to the participant in the form of a brief interview if and when none of the data (pictures) was pertinent to on-site sponsor activities. In analyzing the data, we followed the suggestions made by LeCompte and Preissle (1993) and broke down the data more in-depth than mere descriptions, opting not to "allow readers to draw their own conclusions and risk misinterpretation" (p. 267).

After gathering all data, we constructed categories or themes from the data. The categories, as defined by Merriam (1998), were not funneled through by reviewing one set of photos from each participant. Instead, we looked at the entire set of 10 photos with which all participants returned and compartmentalized overriding themes based on repetition and relevance to the purpose of the study. Prior to conducting this research, we did have some pre-conceived notions about what types of photos may be most popular at a sporting event when given a camera to record. For example, the photos of celebrity or friends are rarely uninviting to the camera lens, so we did manage to develop selected "hypotheses." The data naturally ended up testing such hypotheses, but the crux of this research was not to test any pre-meditated themes or concepts. Instead, we tried to observe and record visually what "motivates" the fans, and to see if they indeed match with what the sponsor (LG) "thinks" would motivate the fans.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative inquiry encompasses meanings different from "reliability and validity" in traditional quantitative research. The term, "confirmability" or rigor in qualitative work often replaces internal validity in a quantitative study and the word "dependability" is used to communicate the traditional concept of reliability (Creswell, 1998). In order to enhance the internal validity (confirmability) of this study, the researchers employed several of the techniques that Merriam (1998) suggests; triangulation, member checks, long-term observation, peer examination, participatory or collaborative modes of research, and researcher's biases (p.205). In particular, we placed heavy emphasis on satisfying "multiple protocols of triangulation" (Denzin, 1984). Specifically, the initial form of triangulation occurred in a methodological sense, utilizing interviews, observation, and physical artifacts that confirmed the emerging findings. In addition, multiple sources of data such as interview transcripts and photos enhanced internal validity of this study. Lastly, we achieved theory triangulation that involves additional researchers to compare data since no two investigators interpret things entirely the same.

Furthermore, peer examination technique, suggested by Merriam (1998), was utilized for further validation. An expert in sport management regarding verification of findings and analysis examined this work. We additionally sought an interdisciplinary peer review through an additional expert in the Applied Statistics and Research Methods. Lastly, we firmly believe that our professional background in the field of sport marketing for more than 10 years qualified as what Merriam (1998) calls researchers' biases that can strengthen validity of a study.

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Findings

In terms of evaluating the effectiveness of on-site sponsorship activation vis-à-vis matching spectator interests with sponsor programs, few previous works were found. In addition, a study involving sponsorship evaluation for burgeoning sport like the action sports is even more rare. Furthermore, past studies on sport sponsorship evaluation in qualitative methods are almost non-existent. This does not mean that the need is waning. On the contrary, as noted by Sweet (2003), "Many sport sponsors say they are taking a closer look at their return on investment (ROI), especially in light of the slow economy and a sport landscape that offers a wider variety of opportunities" (p. 27). More than ever, sponsorship evaluation is becoming an indispensable component of sponsorship activation. To learn about the efficacy with which sport sponsors spend more than \$100 million annually (Stotlar, 2004) in connecting with the consumer interests is of gargantuan importance.

As sporadic as research efforts on sponsorship evaluation at action sport venues have been in the past, Bennett, Henson, and Zhang (2002) conducted a preliminary study on sponsor recognition at three action sports venues. However, it only surveyed the recognition and accuracy levels of various sponsors' names, employing a quantitative research method among high school and college students. Our study focused on one particular sponsor, LG, and sought to find a match between what the consumers visually record as "meaningful items" at an action sports event and all the activated components of sponsorship at the venue by LG, such as LG Girls, LG Inflatables, LG product demonstrations, LG logos and banners, LG music stage, LG public announcement, and LG on-site personnel. The

sponsor under the microscope in this study, LG, has invested a significant amount of financial and human resources in sponsoring this event in the hopes of “being recognized” by, and of “creating meaningful experiences” with its core consumers. By describing thoroughly of what the participants actually “took notice,” albeit through camera lenses, as the most meaningful sight at the venue, we strongly believe that LG can learn a great deal about whether their activated components at the venue are attracting interests from the fans and also about their ROI.

“The feedback from the participants, however, strongly suggests that the photo-journaling experience clearly educated them about the product—its features, functions, and the usage. Furthermore, the positive sentiment that they gained from interacting with the LG product and who they thought of as LG personnel undoubtedly enhanced the brand.”

Photo journaling results

As mentioned in the “Participants and setting” section of this paper, most of the participants in this activity had direct access to both the LG Action Sports Championship area and the L.A. County Fair area. There was no physical separation between the two events, so whoever paid to attend one event could also watch the other. Most of the 17 participants, as previously instructed, came back with 10 photos that represented their biggest interests at the venue. Only a couple of participants returned with less than 10 pictures, because they “were running out of time” or “did not know what else to take.” One participant came back with 12 photos, not realizing that he had taken “that many already.” With approximately 170 data (photos) returned, we first stored them in a PC hard drive in a locked office and looked at each one trying to find common themes across the board, while recalling some of the participants’ interesting comments associated with each photo taken. Some dominant themes were identified and the photos were grouped together accordingly, and some less-dominant themes or even outliers were also spotted.



Athletes

The majority of participants took at least one photo of the athlete competing or practicing in this facility called “the half-pipe.” The half-pipe was the nearest competi-

tion facility from where we were standing and recruiting participants, and we were stationed at about the halfway point between the entrance gate to the venue and the half-pipe. We can safely say that in terms of competition facilities, the half-pipe must have been the first stop for many participants. In addition, the half-pipe offered the closest view of the athletes in action, so many spectators circled around this facility in an attempt to grab an up-close view of the star athletes. When asked to describe the picture, one of the participants simply said, “I thought it was just cool to see them this close.” Another participant said, “Some of the stuff that these guys do are [sic] unbelievable and I thought it was really cool, their techniques and everything.”

An interesting aspect about this facility was that LG had literally “painted” the sides of the half-pipe with their logos, so that, in case someone did take a picture of the athlete, their logo is forever included in the photo as a part of the memory. This is the primary reason that sport marketers are so enamored with the concept of “more logo visibility” at sporting venues. Some logo exposures are not as successful as this one, but the photos provide enough evidence that this particular logo placement was tactically solid and in tune with the interest of the spectators.



Cool signs and graffiti

As a part of the side festivities, the organizers of the LG Action Sports Championship invited local graffiti artists to showcase their work on one side of the wall near the entrance gate. In addition, this wall backed up a small hip-hop dance competition stage where amateur hip-hop dancers were scheduled to compete in the evening. Already in mid afternoon, the area where the stage and the graffiti wall were situated was booming with hip-hop music that a professional deejay (DJ) was streaming constantly through enormous speakers. The blasting music definitely attracted many people and when there was a crowd of people just hanging out in the area, our research participants also took notice, it seems. Most of the participants came back with one or more pictures of “cool signs” or graffiti, mostly hip-hop inspired ones. However, one participant showed us an upside down logo of LG. When we asked him what was so interesting about this photo, he replied, “I don’t know where I saw this one, but when there are so many (right side up) LG logos around here, I thought this upside-down one was really something. It was cool.”

It is always difficult for sport marketers to determine in advance which area or which activated program will draw of the most crowd attention and to place their brand visibly. The half-pipe was very effective for LG, but LG certainly seemed to have missed out on an opportunity with the hip-hop dance stage and the graffiti wall as there really was no brand exposure in these popular areas. This was exactly the kind of learning curve that a visual qualitative inquiry, as opposed to quantitative survey, could provide to the sponsor.



Friends and families

Another popular theme from the photo-journaling activity was, of course, the concept of family or friends. Any experienced sport marketer could foresee that an event like this would draw friends and family members, especially since the event was being co-held with the local fair. The challenge for LG was to figure out how to provide these spectators with the most accommodating venue for friends and families. For example, the two men sitting in the LG product demonstration tent and arm-wrestling each other reinforced LG's pre-conceived tactic of providing a comfortable place for people to hang out while learning about the LG products. Considering that the weather during the field study was scorching hot with intolerable humidity that made people sweat profusely, we did not see enough weather-protected activities from LG that cater to the family needs. This observation was further supported by the next theme that rose from the photos.

One of the most interesting observations from watching these participants' photos came from one female. Her camera was filled with images of ordinary people—sitting down, walking hand-in-hand, holding a baby ... etc. We asked her what these photos meant and she replied, "Well, my theme today was ... happy people. I wanted to take pictures of people who looked really happy here. So, here's one lady looking onto her baby and the baby was taking a nap and he looked so happy and peaceful." Her participation was extraordinary in that she not only knew how to initiate this activity with a tangible goal or theme, but also in that she revealed one of the most telling aspects that all of sport marketers should take whole-heartedly. Her story had nothing to do with action sports nor sponsor logos. What meant most to her at this particular venue, with or without sports, was the notion of happiness. The greatest finding from this study may very well be the fact that spectators

at a sporting event do not necessarily visit there for "sporting reasons," and that there are a plenty of non-sports fans at the venue with whom the brand of LG can connect. The strategy of whether to "connect with these non-sports fans" is strictly left with LG to decide. However, if LG is spending millions of dollars at these events to promote the brand and to eventually sell more products, they might want to take a close look at how influential these non-sport fans at the venue could be when it involves purchasing electronics products. They might very well be the spouse or "significant other" of a die-hard sports fan in which case the purchasing influence could prove to be considerable. Addressing the needs and wants of these non-sports fans at the venue could on the top of the agenda for LG.



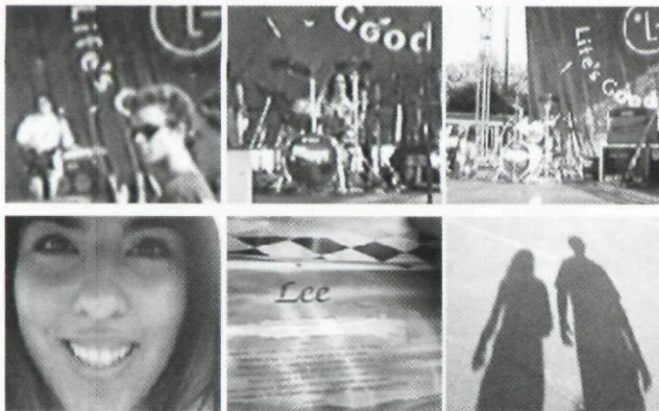
"Freebies"

As mentioned earlier, the weather during the field-work played a critical role in many aspects of the research. However, none seemed to have benefited more from this uncomfortable element than the Yoo-hoo brand. Several participants took photos of this little Yoo-hoo booth where they were serving a free cold cup of chocolate drink. One of the participants told us that "just looking at these drinks made the heat go away." This was spontaneity-driven marketing at its best. Compared to the millions of dollars that some of the official sponsors like LG have spent in putting together a nice array of sponsor programs at the venue, all Yoo-hoo had to do was give free samples. Not only did Yoo-hoo spend considerably less than LG but it was also able to introduce its product and elicit taste tests. This was all happening with the blessings from extremely tired and sweaty spectators.

One participant also commented on the charming bathrooms seen above on the far right. This was a row of mobile bathrooms placed on the trailer, decorated with brand graphics and logos. He said "This was a very neat idea, putting the bathrooms on top of a trailer? It was also very convenient too." Not too many people took a picture of these bathrooms, but it spoke volumes about being creative and accommodating.

Music

The music stage in the center of the venue obviously caught the attention of many participants. As one participant noted, "You can't really miss it. It's so big with a huge LG backdrop." The music stage that LG spon-



sored was seen as a landmark where people met and spent time together. About half the participants came back with a photo of the stage.

Self identity

One of the most illuminating findings from this activity was the attachment of the participants to self-discovery or self-identity. The three pictures shown above completely flabbergasted us the minute we saw them together in our review session. This was something that we had never, in our previous years as sport marketer, imagined. The objects that portrayed “me” or “self” were photographed as one of the most meaningful scenes at the venue. A stone that had a special someone’s name on it or a picture of a shadow between two friends may seem trivial to many, but for those who can find association or meaning to such an object, this item was rarely left out of the camera lens. These photos reaffirmed to us that the brands that excel in their sport marketing programs are the ones that know how to connect emotionally and culturally with people with their marketing programs. Successful marketing is all about people, how to move them emotionally, and how to connect with them (Zyman, 1999).

Interviewing results

Once the photos were reviewed, the participants were asked a number of questions specifically about their recognitions about LG at the venue and other brand-related experiences. Due to the weather conditions, we had to expedite the interview, thus, the opportunity to elaborate on a certain response was limited. It just was not reasonable to make the participants expound on their answers when sweat dripped down on their faces constantly.

LG activated components of sponsorship

A relatively structured form of interview took place regarding the recognition level of LG activated components of sponsorship. These include: LG Girls, LG Inflatables, LG Product Demonstration Tent, LG logos and banners, LG PA announcements, and LG on-site personnel. The general response focused on partici-

pants’ recognition of the items in which LG invested at the venue. For example, regarding the LG Girls who were wearing quite skimpy attire at the product demonstration tent, one guy answered, “Yeah, I saw them, they were goooooood! You should have more of them.” Most, however, did not feel these components “changed their views on LG” one way or another.

Problems with current cell phones

One of the most glaring feedbacks about the problems with their current cell phones was that most, if not all, of the participants were confused about the difference between a problem with their cell phone (e.g., battery life, fragility, or limited function) and a problem with their carrier (e.g., Verizon, Sprint, or AT & T). One participant stated, “Coverage is everything to me. If it works anywhere in California, that’s really convenient, because sometimes my phone does not work in certain areas.” This sentiment was echoed throughout our panel of participants. The words that they used, such as “service,” “low reception,” and “coverage” all relate to carrier issues, but the consumers categorized them as general “cell phone problems.” Through extended consumer education or more effective communication methods, cell phone brands such as LG must let the consumers know these are not technically phone problems.

“What the research team valued most from this qualitative study were some of the revelations that were unveiled in the photo-journaling activities, the ones that no quantitative, Lickert-scaled survey could expose to sport marketers. The themes like “happy people” and “self-discovery” found in this study provide completely different perspectives on what the spectators find “interesting” and “meaningful” at the venue.”

“What can LG do to better interact with consumers?”

We knew this particular question was the most important topic for LG personnel and for our research team as well. We were very interested in hearing directly from LG’s core consumers what they had to say about this brand. A response like “Give us more free product trials” or “Give more free products” was very common. A couple of “more subtle” participants said, “More product demonstrations, getting out there more, and making themselves known.” The most rewarding answer for our team came from one female respondent who said, “More demonstrations like this one—like one-on-one.” We quickly learned to some consumers, the research project was viewed as an extremely personable “product demo session.” It just bestowed a little more responsibility on our shoulders as a representative of the LG brand from that point onward.

"Brands that understand me ..."

Participants had the most difficulty comprehending the gist of this question. Oftentimes, we had to elaborate to them on what this question meant. We realized what is routine nomenclature in marketing does not necessarily convey the same meaning to average consumers. Many participants replied, "not sure on this one," "I don't know what to say," or "I can't think of any." In addition, this question required the most amount of time for the participants to reflect upon, so this question had to be rephrased. For those who did understand the question and answered, some interesting responses emerged. For example, "Wal-Mart—they put thoughts into what the customers want and they do business right." Or, "Nike, because of their comfortable shoes and commercials."

"Selection of cell phone depends on..."

A question of this nature almost always appears on a quantitative survey, but we wanted to hear the participants' direct responses and see if there were intriguing words to describe the purchasing factors. Almost everyone mentioned "quality" as the most important factor and to our surprise, this constantly came ahead of "price." "Style" or "look" was generally a close second. "Commercials" or "dependability" also appeared as an important variable. When asked why "quality" was the most important issue with cell phones, one participant said, "Cell phones are expensive to begin with, so when you finally buy one, you wanna [sic] make sure that it's a good quality phone." Many respondents shared this sentiment.

Comments on LG Photo Journaling Experience

On the second day of fieldwork, this question was deliberately added at the end, replacing the original final question that requested "any additional comments." We felt the new question would engender more interesting feedback to this research. Here are some of their responses: "It was a great, fun experience. Send me some free stuff."; "Very interesting—walking around and taking pictures. I actually liked the LG phone that I used."; "Amusing, different. I thought it was fun. The phone's nice."; "Camera phone was a lot easier to use than I thought it would've. One explanation and it was easy. I definitely feel better about LG phones after actually having tried it."; "It's been great—a lot of giveaways. I tried this LG phone and I've always wanted to try this ... what do you call it—camera phone? It's gonna [sic] be my next phone actually. I've learned how to use this model and I think I'd be more comfortable buying this model, because now I know how to use it."

We firmly believe the comments to this last question represented not only the great utility of qualitative

research, but also the importance of one-to-one, "experience marketing" as the next wave of a great marketing trend (McArthur, 2004). Upon hearing these responses, we immediately had the urge to suggest to LG that they need to do more of this activity in the future. Fancy product demonstration tents and attractive girls inside the tents may be visually appealing, but we really felt they did not achieve the main objectives of introducing products and inducing trials that can eventually lead to product purchase. This research activity, on the other hand, as evidenced by unedited comments made by the participants, changed their views drastically on LG in a couple of hours. Temporary ownership of the product instead of looking at and touching the phones inside the tents made the biggest difference in our opinion. This was the real product-trial.

Conclusion

As much as we thoroughly enjoyed this entire experience of interacting with our participants, we would like to conclude this work by first pointing out limitations we noticed throughout the process. The first issue was weather. Prior research on the weather conditions during the duration of the fieldwork was not sufficient. When the Weather Channel indicated "Sunny in the mid 80s," it failed to prepare us for the humidity and, consequentially, the perspiration factor that exhausted our participants both mentally and physically. As a result, we had to rush through many interviews, often precluding us from further illuminations. This was unfortunate since we felt strongly that some of the responses could have and should have been followed up in more detail. In the future, we must consider spending more time with event organizers in advance to cope with similar weather-related situations.

Another key issue centered on the questionnaire we used for the interview. Although we repeatedly sought consultations from experts in the field prior to conducting the fieldwork, a bit of redundancy and difficulty with some questions was recognized.

Practitioners in sport marketing already have a firm grip on the basics of on-site sponsorship activation and research in the field has also suggested that a variety of corporate objectives are pursued through sport sponsorship (Stotlar, 2001; Pope & Voges, 2000; Irwin & Sutton, 1994). What the research team valued most from this qualitative study were some of the revelations that were unveiled in the photo-journaling activities, the ones that no quantitative, Lickert-scaled survey could expose to sport marketers. The themes like "happy people" and "self-discovery" found in this study provide completely different perspectives on what the spectators find "interesting" and "meaningful" at the venue. Sport marketers

"hope" that their "logo blitz" in a sporting venue would be recognized by the spectators and in some instances their strategy proved to be more than mere wishful thinking. However, we believe this study has put things in perspective for many sport marketers in that logo placement, along with myriad of other sponsored activities at the venue, is just a small fraction of what the spectator visually records and assigns meaning to.

In order to transcend the illusion of effectiveness and elevate sport sponsorship activation to another level, sport managers today must provide an experience that is more than a simple, one-dimensional logo viewing. In this respect, we believe that an improved and continued practice of on-site qualitative research activities could be a legitimate option. This study was not conducted to test the applicability of qualitative research as an on-site sport-marketing tool. The feedback from the participants, however, strongly suggests that the photo-journaling experience clearly educated them about the product—its features, functions, and usage. Furthermore, the positive sentiment that participants gained from interacting with the LG product, and whom they thought of as LG personnel, undoubtedly enhanced the brand.

The purpose of this study was to see whether the sponsored activities at a sporting venue, such as logo placement, product demonstrations, hospitality centers...etc., actually matched with the interests of spectators. The study was conducted in collaboration with LG Electronics that provided the venue for this field study at one of their title-sponsored sporting events. The answer to our research question was somewhat divided in that some sponsored programs indeed matched the interests of spectators, but some did not. More importantly, this study shed light on some new consumer insights that may eventually guide LG to pursue unconventional yet meaningful programs. What LG activated at the action sports venue is considered to be traditional components of sport sponsorship (Stotlar, 2004), and the participants noticed most of these components but rarely placed any importance on them.

Based upon the findings of this study, the recognition of the sponsored activities definitely exists, but in order to provide truly meaningful experience that persists in the heart of consumers, there is definitely room for improvement. We believe that to get the product actively in the hands of the customers is of utmost importance. Temporary ownership, instead of traditional and often confusing product demos, could be a viable option. Not only would this allow sufficient time for product trial, it would also convey a sense of trust to the brand's prospective buyers. For example, "Wow, LG just let me use it for the whole day!" How would such a genuine gesture in this day and age register in

the minds of consumers? To conduct a pre-event survey to find "touch points" with the audience would be another opportunity. This would allow the brand to learn in advance what matters to the public and to associate its products with those points.

To the researchers, this study represented a first step towards the new perspective in sponsorship evaluation. The more flexibility we embrace in the pursuit of knowledge, the more diversity and novelty will emerge from the ever-volatile minds and hearts of consumers.

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